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SUBJECT: LUKASHENKO RECONFIRMS HIS PLAN TO REMAIN PRESIDENT
FOR LIFE

REF: MINSK 304

Summary

11. (SBU) During a press conference with independent and state media on April 12, Lukashenko denied rumors that he was grooming one of his two legitimate sons for the presidency, stressing that he plans to remain in power for the "foreseeable future." During his most recent statements to the press on April 12, Lukashenko indicated that control of radio and TV stations remains a high priority for the GOB. As such, no private radio or TV stations would be allowed to launch in Belarus. Lukashenko suggested that independent media coverage of his personal life and family was the reason for restrictions on them. He also reiterated earlier statements that Russia remains a vital partner and relations with the EU could only progress on his terms.

Independent Media

12. (U) On April 12, for the first time in a year and a half, Lukashenko included independent media in a press conference. Lukashenko stated that broadcast registration was not likely to become easier in the future, implying that he would not allow private radio and TV stations to launch in Belarus. Lukashenko elaborated that state control of radio and television remains a very high priority, and that the GOB's attitude toward them "was one of caution." Lukashenko stated that restrictions on independent media were linked to their coverage of his personal life and family. He made it clear that state publishing houses would never sign contracts with publications such as independent publications that broke media laws.

Lukashenko's Successor

13. (SBU) Lukashenko stated that he plans to remain president for the foreseeable future. He denied categorically any plan to designate his eldest son Viktor, currently on the State Security Council, as his successor. He labeled his eldest son as too weak to take over his father's position. Lukashenko also denied that he was preparing his second son, Dmitry, to become president. He did say that he might prepare a "third son" for the presidency. (Note: Lukashenko could be referring to the young son he is alleged to have with a mistress. End note.)

Lukashenko Re-emphasized Points Made in Earlier Speeches

¶4. (U) Lukashenko underscored again that Belarus was prepared for improved relations with the EU, but only on his terms (reftel). Concerning Russia, he said that while the gas and oil conflict had strained relations, Russia remains a vital partner and relations could be mended within a week. Finally, he underscored several times that he had and would continue to protect Belarus' independence, even from Russia.

Comment

¶5. (SBU) Lukashenko's refusal to speculate who might one day succeed him confirms he plans to remain president as long as he is physically capable. While the fact that control of broadcast media remains a high priority for the GOB is nothing new, we were surprised by his candor in discussing restrictions on independent media. Unfortunately, due to state control of the media, many may believe his deceptive statements about the content of independent media publications.

Moore